

	<p style="text-align: center;">RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY & PERFORMANCE PANEL</p> <p style="text-align: center;">23 SEPTEMBER 2004</p>	<p>AGENDA ITEM:</p>
<p>BUDGET CONSULTATION 2005/6</p> <p>Ward(s): ALL</p>		
<p>Portfolio: Councillor J G O'Hare</p> <p>Service: Finance</p> <p>Summary of report: This report outlines budget consultation approaches for the 2005/6 budget setting round.</p>		
<p>Background Papers: None.</p>		
<p>Reason for Scrutiny:</p> <p>On 22 April 2004 the panel requested a report for this meeting on the proposed budget consultation process to be undertaken with residents and stakeholders to support the setting of the 2005/06 budget. The panel may wish to consider these and other options, explore ways in which the panel or other members could participate in the consultation process, and make recommendations to cabinet.</p>		
<p>Signed </p> <p>Executive Director CAROLE EVANS</p> <p>Date: 14 September 2004</p>		
<p>Resource and Legal Considerations</p> <p>The consultation exercise feeding into the 2004/05 budget cost around £7k. This proved a valuable investment, enabling a more comprehensive and objective consultation, which was used in key decisions regarding the council's medium term budget and service delivery to residents and other stakeholders. It is proposed that that planned exercise for 2005/06 will be more extensive but is expected to cost a maximum of £10k which can be met from existing budgets.</p>		

Citizen Impact

The budget consultation exercise provides an opportunity to seek residents' and partners' views and priorities for expenditure, and enables cabinet to take these views into account as they seek to finalise the budget for recommendation to council for the year ahead.

Also the views obtained through the exercise will be used by the council and by council services in other ways, just as the outcomes of the 2004/05 budget consultation process were fed to services, and utilised fully in the development of the council's vision for the borough, Vision 2008, reflected in service plans across the council.

Environment Impact

Issues raised by the focus groups and by partners in previous budget consultations have included those relating to environmental concerns.

Performance Management and Risk Management Issues

It is intended that the outcomes of these budget consultations will be fed through to council services in a structured way, using the integrated planning framework which links the vision, service planning, performance management and individual plans. This enables the council to address specific points in the year ahead, and enable participants to receive feedback on the points that they have raised.

Equality Implications

The focus groups established by the council for budget consultation will be developed in such a way to be broadly representative of the local community. Issues raised through previous processes included issues relating to diversity, equality and access.

Consultation

These proposals for budget consultation demonstrate how the council is seeking to develop innovative ways of consulting with residents and partners on key issues affecting the borough, building on the process adopted in earlier years. Officers will again seek feedback from participants to enable further improvements for the coming year. Proposals that emerge from the present scrutiny review will enable the Council to demonstrate how it is learning year on year, and demonstrating continuous improvement of its key processes.

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1. Introduction

The outcome of the budget consultation process for 2004/05 was reported to this panel on 4 March 2004. A further report discussing a range of options and mechanisms for developing further and improving the annual budget consultation undertaken with residents and stakeholders for 2005/06 was received by the panel on 22 April 2004.

Following that meeting and the comments made by the panel regarding the use of the internet, focus groups, the citizens panel, and staff and citizen suggestion schemes, the purpose of this report is to seek further comment on the specific plans for budget consultation to support the 2005/06 budget setting process, so as to strengthen these plans through scrutiny.

2. Update on Budget consultation matters

The success of the budget consultation process was acknowledged by the budget consultation team receiving a civic award: *"Team of the Year – Customer Impact."* A particular strength being that the team comprised officers from a number of services. This and other positive feedback has reinforced the view that the process applied for the last 2 years should be built upon and the partnership with Vision 21 be continued to undertake focus group work with targeted groups, alongside in-house arranged and facilitated meetings with the business, voluntary and community sectors. Staff views will also be sought.

In addition to the established methodology, it is also proposed that the budget consultation process be complemented by a general survey undertaken by the council's pilot Citizens Panel, which will initiate the consultation process and provide baseline issues upon which further consultation will be built. The panel itself consists of a representative sample of 500 residents from across the borough, plus a further booster sample of 100 residents to assist with representation.

Further input to the process will also be made via reviews with the nine local neighbourhood partnerships, which will be undertaking consultation within their areas, as part of the development of local neighbourhood plans, during the autumn, so as to identify and confirm key priority issues within their area.

3. Proposals for 2005/06 budget consultation process

Budget consultation during 2004/05 was positive and provides a solid foundation on which to build. It is proposed that budget consultation supporting the setting of the budget for 2005/06 is undertaken as follows:

When:	Who with:	Process
Oct/Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizens Panel• Use of council website/kiosks• Resident Focus Groups x 5• Youth Opinion Unite	<p>Face-to-face individual survey base-lining priorities and issues – linked to Vision.</p> <p>E-consultation on base line priorities; possible 'message board' and question and answer facility.</p> <p>Facilitation & Recruitment – Vision 21</p> <p>Facilitation V21/Recruitment in-house</p>

Nov/Dec	• Black Minority Ethnic Focus Group	Facilitation V21/Recruitment in-house
	• User & Carers Focus Group x2	Facilitation V21/Recruitment in-house
	• Business Community Focus Group	In-house Invitation/Facilitation
Dec/Jan	• Voluntary & Community Sectors meeting Group	In-house Invitation/Facilitation
	• Staff Focus Group	Facilitation V21/Recruitment in-house
Jan	• Local Neighbourhood Partnerships	Opportunity for LNPs to discuss budget in context of emerging LNP Action Plans.
	• Reflector Group	Representatives from all consultations invited to final focus group to re-check proposals
	• Business Sector Draft Budget Presentation	
	• Voluntary/Community sector Draft Budget Presentation	

To deliver the above it is envisaged that Vision 21 will support the October and November meetings and provide some training and support for lead council officers to facilitate the budget consultation with LNPs, the business, voluntary and community sectors.

An innovation this year is the proposed use of a reflector group towards the end of the process. This will comprise of representatives from previous groups and it will receive specific information on the draft budget and they will be able to check that the comments / issues raised in their groups have been taken into account.

4. Potential Scrutiny Activities

It is envisaged that this consultation plan will be further refined and developed. The panel may wish to consider its own role in the budget consultation process, including the possible attendance of panel members at budget consultation events and meetings. This would help to maintain a scrutiny role both throughout the consultation process itself and those which it informs, including budget setting, service planning and performance management, thus contributing to the on-going development of the council's approach to a range of activities and policy formulation.